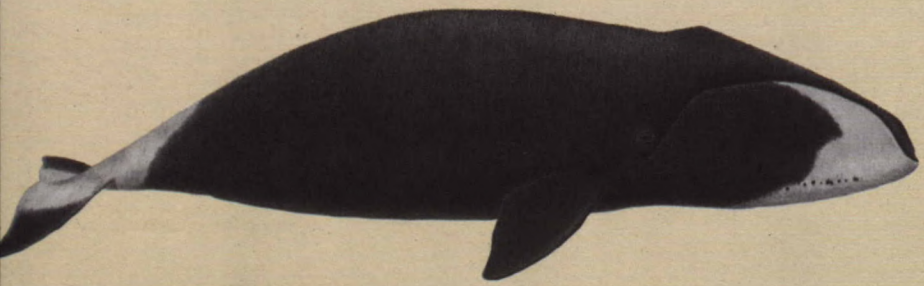
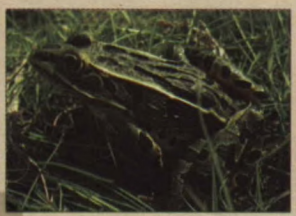
2008 EDITION

SPECIES AT RISK

In the Northwest Territories

A guide to NWT species legally listed under the federal *Species at Risk Act* and those under consideration for listing





Canada

Northwest Territories

Copies are available from:

Environment Canada
Canadian Wildlife Service
Prairie and Northern Region
Suite 301, 5204 - 50th Avenue
Yellowknife, NT X1A 1E2
867-669-4766
or
Environment and Natural Resources
Government of the
Northwest Territories
PO Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT, Canada X1A 2L9
867-920-8064

Also available in French under the title: *Espèces en péril aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest: un guide des espèces des TN-O incluses dans la liste légale sous la Loi sur les espèces en péril fédérale et autres espèces considérées, édition 2008*

ISBN: 978-0-7708-0174-8

This booklet has been printed on recycled paper.

Cover photo and art credits
Bowhead Whale: Gerald Kuehl
Wood Bison: Lee Keary
Northern Leopard Frog: Kris Kendall
Whooping Crane: Brian Johns

Back Cover
Peregrine Falcon: Steven Mathews

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SPECIES AT RISK

Species at Risk in the Northwest Territories

Aboriginal groups, scientists and people with an interest in the natural world have noticed and documented the disappearance of certain plants and animals for some time.

Every jurisdiction in Canada, has signed the *Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk* and in doing so, has agreed to work towards a national approach for protecting species at risk, with the goal of preventing species in Canada from becoming extinct as a consequence of human activity.

The responsibility for the conservation of wildlife in the Northwest Territories is shared by federal and territorial governments and wildlife co-management boards. The federal government is responsible for migratory birds, aquatic species and terrestrial species found on federal lands. The territorial government has primary responsibility for other species.

In 2003, the Government of Canada enacted the *Species at Risk Act* with the goal of protecting wildlife species and their habitats. The purposes of the *Species at Risk Act* are to prevent wildlife species from being extirpated or becoming extinct, to provide for the recovery of wildlife species that are extirpated, endangered or threatened as a result of human activity, and to manage species of special concern to prevent them from becoming endangered or threatened. The Act establishes a process for conducting scientific assessments of the national population status of individual species, and a mechanism for listing Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern species. The *Species at Risk Act* includes provisions for the protection of individuals of listed wildlife species, and for their critical habitats and residences.

The *Species at Risk Act* is designed to work in a complementary fashion with provincial/territorial legislation and cooperatively with Aboriginal people to protect species at risk and their habitats. Currently the Northwest Territories is developing species at risk legislation to address species that are at risk in the Northwest Territories, and is working cooperatively with the federal government to protect and manage federally listed species at risk under their jurisdiction through existing legislation.

For more information about the federal *Species at Risk Act* visit www.sararegistry.gc.ca.

ASSESSMENT AND LISTING

Doug Dance

Assessment and Listing of Species at Risk in Canada

Assessment: The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) is a national committee of experts that assesses the biological status of species and assigns each one to a category of risk based on the best available scientific, community and Aboriginal traditional knowledge. COSEWIC makes a recommendation on "risk level" to the federal government. The list of all the species recommended by COSEWIC for listing as a species at risk is the COSEWIC list.

Legal Listing: After receiving COSEWIC's assessment and consulting with the appropriate Minister(s) and wildlife management boards, the Minister makes a recommendation to the Governor in Council and the decision is made on whether to add species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk (Schedule 1) of the *Species at Risk Act* or to refer the matter back to COSEWIC for further information or consideration.

This booklet describes both Schedule 1 and the COSEWIC list of species found in the Northwest Territories at the time of printing. Please visit the *Species at Risk Act* Public Registry at www.sararegistry.gc.ca and the COSEWIC website at www.cosewic.gc.ca for the most recent information.

CATEGORIES

Categories of species at risk

Species at risk are listed in one of five categories:

Extinct: a wildlife species that no longer exists anywhere in the world

Extirpated: a wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere

Endangered: a wildlife species that is facing imminent extirpation or extinction

Threatened: a wildlife species likely to become an endangered species if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction

Special Concern: a wildlife species that may become a threatened or endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide will help you identify species at risk and their ranges in the Northwest Territories. This publication will be updated periodically to reflect changes to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act* and to COSEWIC's list of species at risk. For the most current list of species on Schedule 1, visit www.sararegistry.gc.ca. For the most current COSEWIC list, visit www.cosewic.gc.ca.

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

The information in this section describes the typical habitat of the species in the Northwest Territories.

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

Threats to a species can vary from region to region. The information in this section describes specific threats to the species in the Northwest Territories.

Photos, accompanied by text will help you identify the species in the field.

Range Map

The range map shows the distribution of each species in the Northwest Territories so that you can determine at a glance where they occur. Please note that the species range maps in this booklet are approximate and are not intended for legal use.

Did you know?

The information in this section highlights interesting facts about the species.

SCHEDULE 1

WOOD BISON

Bison bison athabascae

THREATENED

DESCRIPTION

Wood Bison are the largest land mammals in North America. They are dark brown, have a massive head, a distinct beard, a shoulder hump and curved horns

Weight:
Males: 650-900 kg (1430-2000 lb);
Females: 500-550 kg (1100-1200 lb)
Height at shoulder: 1.5-2.0 m (4-6 ft)

Once on the verge of extinction due to over-hunting and disease, **Wood Bison** now occur in the Northwest Territories in several free-ranging herds. Some herds, such as the Mackenzie and Nahanni populations, are disease-free. Others, such as the Wood Buffalo National Park and adjacent Slave River Lowland populations, are infected with tuberculosis or brucellosis.

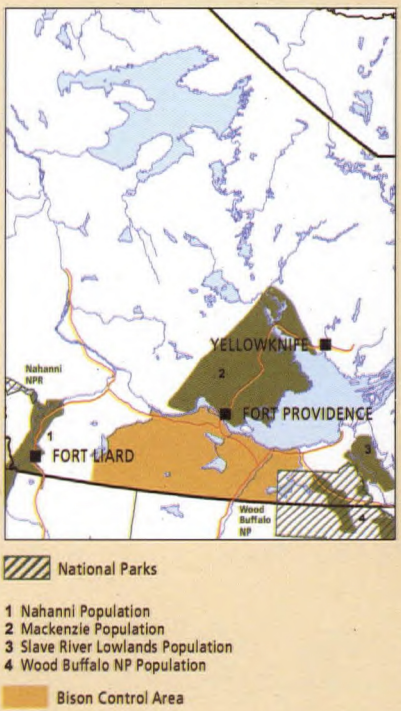
Brett Elkin

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- Slave River Lowlands and Mackenzie: willow savannas with grasses and sedges
- Liard River drainage: meadows with horsetails

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- diseases including anthrax, brucellosis, and tuberculosis
- expanding agriculture and forestry and collisions with traffic
- spring floods and falling through thin ice
- limited genetic diversity in disease-free populations due to small number of animals initially introduced into those areas



Did you know?

- A Bison Control Area was created to prevent the spread of diseases to the healthy Mackenzie and Nahanni populations. All bison in the control area are presumed to be disease carriers and are therefore removed.
- The Mackenzie population of 2000 bison is the largest free-ranging disease-free herd in the world. The Nahanni population has about 400 bison and the Slave River Lowlands population has about 450 bison in the western lowlands and 250 bison in the eastern lowlands.

SCHEDULE 1

WOODLAND CARIBOU

Rangifer tarandus caribou

THREATENED - Boreal population
SPECIAL CONCERN - Northern Mountain population

DESCRIPTION

Both populations of Woodland Caribou look the same. Woodland Caribou are larger, darker, have thicker and broader antlers, longer legs and a longer face than Barren-ground Caribou, which can be found in some of the Boreal population's range.

Weight: 110-210 kg (240-460 lbs)

Height at shoulder: 1.0-1.2 m (3.3-4.0 ft)

Woodland Caribou are divided into two types, Boreal Caribou and Northern Mountain Caribou. Boreal Caribou live in the forests east of the Mackenzie Mountains. They live in small groups and prefer to stay within the forest year round. Northern Mountain Caribou live in the Mackenzie Mountains in large groups, sometimes in the thousands, and have distinct migrations where they change elevation depending on the season. Recent research suggests that Woodland Caribou populations in the Northwest Territories are stable but populations have decreased throughout the rest of their range.

Boreal Caribou

Northern Mountain Caribou

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- Boreal Caribou: almost all forested areas east of the Mackenzie Mountains, provided they are in or able to access areas away from human disturbance, industrial areas, and other human made features
- Northern Mountain Caribou: remote areas of the Mackenzie Mountains (upper subalpine area in summer and lower subalpine forests with shallow snow cover in winter)

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- Boreal Caribou: habitat changes (especially landscape changes from oil and gas and forestry development) that result in increased access by predators and hunters
- Northern Mountain Caribou: limited threats - there are some concerns about increased hunting pressure from access roads in the Yukon and increased mineral exploration activities

Did you know?

- There is limited harvesting of Woodland Caribou in the Northwest Territories. Aboriginal harvest is low and there is a limit of one animal per year for resident hunters. Non-residents can only hunt Woodland Caribou in the Mackenzie Mountains.
- Boreal caribou are sometimes called the "grey ghosts of the forest" because they are secretive and difficult to find, and when disturbed they usually disappear quickly into the forest.

SCHEDULE 1

BOWHEAD WHALE

Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort population

Balaena mysticetus

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

The Bowhead Whale is a large baleen whale (whale with baleen plates for filtering food rather than teeth) with a stocky barrel-shaped body and a large head making up about 30 percent of its length. Its body is mostly black; white markings appear with age on the chin, fluke tips and tail. Their flippers are small and paddle-shaped and they do not have a dorsal fin. The upper jaw is bowed sharply upward with an average of 330 baleen plates on each side. Adult females are slightly larger than adult males.

Length:
Females: 16-18 m (53-59 ft);
Males: 14-17 m (46-56 ft)
Weight: 75-100 t (82-110 tons)

Bowhead Whales are still recovering from commercial whaling. The Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Bowhead Whale population spends the winter in the western and central Bering Sea where there is adequate open water and broken pack ice. In spring, the whales migrate north and east to their summer feeding grounds in the eastern Beaufort Sea. They feed mostly on dense aggregations of small invertebrates or "zooplankton" (mainly copepods, but also euphasiids, mysids, amphipods and isopods). Females give birth every three or four years to a single calf, usually during the spring migration. Bowhead Whales can live to be over 150 years of age.

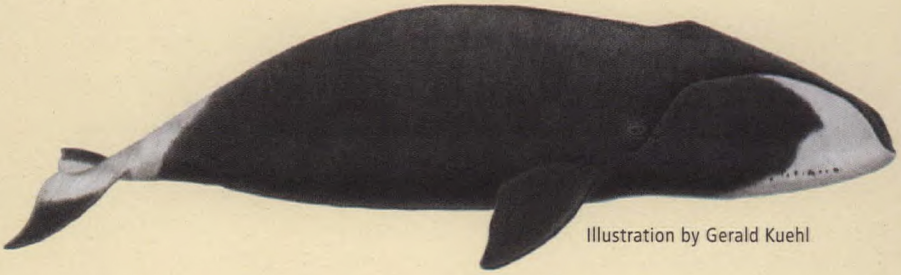
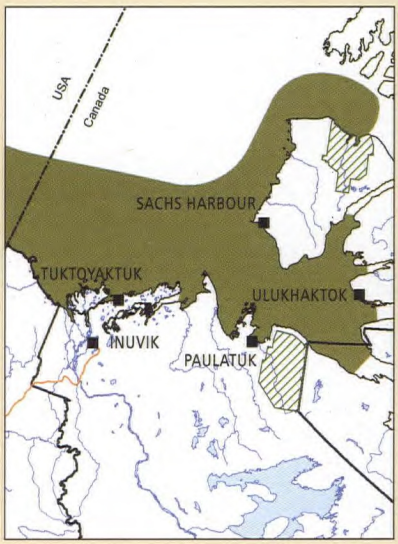


Illustration by Gerald Kuehl


Marc Gadoury



Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- marine waters ranging from open water to thick, extensive pack ice

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- vessel traffic, underwater noise and possible hydrocarbon spills associated with offshore development (e.g. oil and gas) in the Beaufort Sea

Did you know?

- A weapon fragment found in a Bowhead Whale caught off the Alaskan coast in May 2007 dated back to 1879.
- Bowhead Whales are able to use their head and back to break ice over 20 cm thick, in order to breathe.

SCHEDULE 1

GREY WHALE

Eastern North Pacific population

Eschrichtius robustus

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

The Grey Whale is a medium- to large-sized baleen whale with a streamlined body and narrow, tapered head. It has dark grey mottled skin, often covered with patches of barnacles and crustaceans. This whale does not have a dorsal fin but has a low hump and a series of seven to fifteen knuckles along the dorsal ridge. The Grey Whale is the only large whale whose upper jaw extends beyond the lower. Two to four grooves on the underside of the throat allow the whale to extend its throat so it can feed by scooping up bottom sediment and straining it through its baleen.

Length:
Females: 12-15 m (39-50 ft);
Males: 11-14 m (36-46 ft)
Weight: 22-38 t (24-42 tons)

Grey Whales are susceptible to human activities especially while they spend the winter on their calving grounds in Mexico where females give birth to a single calf. In spring most migrate north to their summer feeding grounds in northern Alaska, Russia and the southern Beaufort Sea where they feed mainly on shrimp-like animals (amphipod crustaceans). Calves are weaned in late summer. Grey Whales can live up to 70 years of age.

M.O / DFO

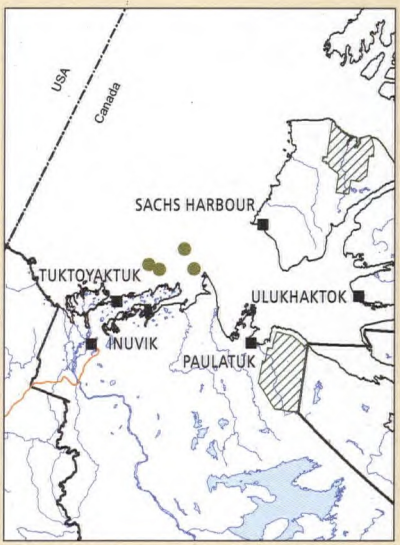
Illustration by A. Denbigh

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- shallow (< 60 m) water close to shore, over mud or sand bottoms

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- loss of habitat due to industrial development (e.g. oil and gas) and associated noise
- reduced feeding due to ice cover on summer feeding grounds (may lessen with climate change)
- collisions with ships



Baleen plates

Did you know?

- Because Grey Whales re-circulate nutrients from bottom sediments through the water column, they are an important species in arctic marine ecosystems.
- Grey Whales travel over 16 000 km (round trip) between the lagoons of Baja California and their feeding grounds in the Bering and Beaufort Seas.

SCHEDULE 1

ESKIMO CURLEW

Numenius borealis

ENDANGERED

DESCRIPTION

The Eskimo Curlew is a mottled brownish shorebird with long legs and a long, thin, slightly down-curving bill. It can be confused with its close relative, the Whimbrel, but is smaller (the size of a pigeon) and does not have the Whimbrel's distinct central head stripe.

Length: 35 cm (13.8 in)

Eskimo Curlews once nested abundantly in the barrens of the Northwest Territories. During fall migration, huge flocks flew to the east coast and then non-stop to Argentina. Spring migration was through Texas and the mid-western states, with some birds found in the Canadian Prairies. Eskimo Curlews were hunted to near extinction during the 19th century.

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- known breeding habitat consisted of upland tundra, treeless dwarf shrub and grass tundra, and grassy meadow habitat

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- loss and degradation of potential breeding habitat

Did you know?

- The Eskimo Curlew has been near extinction for much of the last century. There have only been a few confirmed occurrences in the Northwest Territories in the last 20 years. There has been no evidence of nesting since 1866.
- Scientists have determined that recovery of this species is not feasible at this time.
- The Eskimo Curlew had only two known breeding locations, both in the Northwest Territories: at the base of Bathurst Peninsula in the Anderson River area, and in the region of Amundsen Gulf-Coronation Gulf-Coppermine River.

SCHEDULE 1

WHOOPING CRANE

Grus americana

ENDANGERED

DESCRIPTION

Measuring an impressive 1.5 metres (5 feet), Whooping Cranes are the tallest birds in North America. They have a white body with a red and black head and black-tipped wings.

Height: 1.5 m (5 ft)
Weight: 6.4 to 7.3 kg (14 to 16 lb)

Whooping Cranes winter in southern Texas and arrive on their breeding grounds in the Northwest Territories in April and May. They lay two eggs in a nest consisting of a pile of vegetation in shallow water. Usually only one of the chicks survives to fly south in September. Whooping Cranes eat small fish and animals, insects, roots, berries and grain. Whooping Cranes almost went extinct in the 1940s due to habitat loss in their prairie breeding grounds and overharvest by settlers.

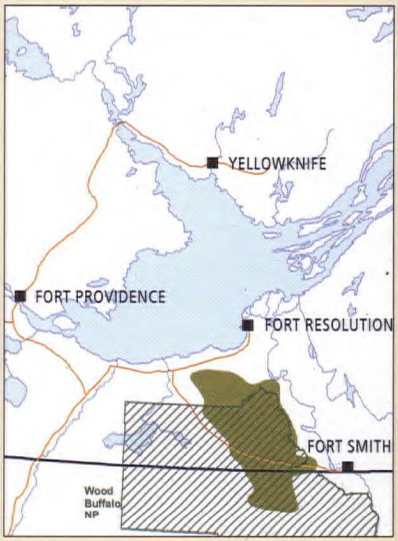
Brian Johns

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- nest in shallow ponds that contain bulrush or sedge, and that are separated by narrow forested ridges in and around the north east corner of Wood Buffalo National Park
- the first species at risk in the Northwest Territories with critical habitat identified under the *Species at Risk Act* (protected in Wood Buffalo National Park)

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- habitat loss and degradation
- disturbance on breeding grounds (aircraft flights and human foot traffic)
- collisions with power lines
- predators on breeding grounds (black bear, wolverine, gray wolf, red fox, mink, lynx, and common raven)
- accidental shooting



Did you know?

- The Whooping Crane's large wings allow them to fly for up to 10 hours non-stop.
- From 21 cranes in the early 1940s, the more than 500 Whooping Cranes in North America today are descendants of only three family lines.
- The population that nests in and around Wood Buffalo National Park is the only natural wild breeding population in the world.

SCHEDULE 1

PEREGRINE FALCON

Falco peregrinus

THREATENED - anatum subspecies

DESCRIPTION

The Peregrine Falcon is a dark-coloured crow-sized bird with long pointed wings, black cheek patches and a dark "cap" on its head.

Length: 40-50 cm (16-20 in)

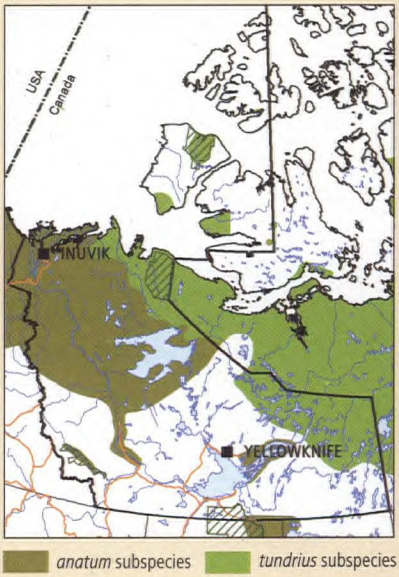
Two subspecies of **Peregrine Falcons**, *anatum* (boreal) and *tundrius* (tundra), occur in the Northwest Territories. The *anatum* subspecies breeds mainly in the forest and the *tundrius* subspecies mainly on the tundra. Peregrine falcon populations suffered a serious decline in the 1970s due to the widepspread use of DDT as a pesticide. Reduction in DDT use worldwide and active recovery efforts helped populations recover. In 2007 COSEWIC combined these subspecies into one sub-population complex, and recommended it be downlisted to a species of Special Concern under the *Species at Risk Act.*

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- sheltered ledges or crevices in cliffs, near water and good foraging areas

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- human disturbance at nest sites from cabin building, recreational activities
- increased development along the Mackenzie River, as well as resource exploration or development in other areas
- other threats include poaching of eggs and nestlings for falconry, declining songbird or seabird prey populations due to climate change and changes in ocean productivity, and susceptibility to DDT and organochlorine pesticide contamination, which causes reproductive failure due to softening of eggs



Did you know?

- The Northwest Territories *Wildlife Act* protects all raptor eggs, nests and individuals, making it illegal to hunt, possess or export Peregrine Falcons (or their parts) without a permit.
- Peregrines can reach speeds of more than 320 kph (200 mph) when diving for their prey.
- Successful recovery efforts over the last 30 years have helped the species recover.

SCHEDULE 1

IVORY GULL

Pagophila eburnea

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

The Ivory Gull is a medium-sized gull that can be identified by its pure white plumage and black legs.

Weight: 448-687 g (16 to 24 oz)
Length: 40-49 cm (16 to 19 in)

Ivory Gulls are found across northern Canada, Greenland and the western European Arctic. They arrive in the Arctic in late April and move to nesting colonies in June. Colony size ranges from 20 to 200 pairs and they lay one to three eggs. In September, birds begin to move to their wintering grounds in the northern seas, along the southern edge of the pack ice. Ivory Gulls have declined by about 80 percent in 20 years, and this decline may be attributed to illegal harvest in Greenland, high levels of certain contaminants in their foods, and degradation of ice-related feeding areas as a result of climate change. COSEWIC reassessed the Ivory Gull in April 2006 and classified them as Endangered.


Grant Gilchrist

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- pack ice or in areas of open water surrounded by ice (polynyas)
- uncommon migrant in the Beaufort Sea and may winter in the offshore leads (fractures in the sea ice exposing open water) in some years

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- disturbance and pollution at marine feeding and resting areas
- contaminants affecting the food they eat
- degradation of marine feeding areas as a result of climate change
- human disturbance at colonies
- human activities resulting in increased numbers of predators (foxes, ravens, other gulls) near colonies

▲ Ivory Gull Historic Colonies

● Ivory Gull Colonies

Did you know?

- In Canada, Ivory Gulls currently only nest in Nunavut on windswept plateaus, ice-choked islands, or on steep cliffs of mountains protruding from glaciers. They once nested on Prince Patrick Island in the Northwest Territories, but this site has been abandoned since its initial discovery in the 1800s.
- Large expanses of the western Arctic are apparently unsuitable for nesting Ivory Gulls because there is no ice-free ocean regularly available when the birds arrive to breed. Furthermore, the flat vegetated landscape of these islands supports predators of the Ivory Gull, such as foxes.

SCHEDULE 1

YELLOW RAIL

Coturnicops noveboracensis

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

The Yellow Rail is a small bird with a short tail, short bill, and buffy plumage. The wide dark stripes on its back are crossed by white bars. The white wing patch, which is visible in flight, helps distinguish Yellow Rails from other similar marsh birds.

Weight: Males: 60 g (2 oz)
Length: 15-19 cm (6 to 7.5 in)

Yellow Rails breed in Canada and the northern United States and winter on the East and Gulf coasts of the United States. They likely arrive in the Northwest Territories in the latter part of May and nesting occurs in June and possibly July. Females lay seven to ten eggs on nests built on or just above the ground, that are concealed with a canopy of dead vegetation. Habitat loss, especially on their wintering grounds, has particularly affected Yellow Rails.

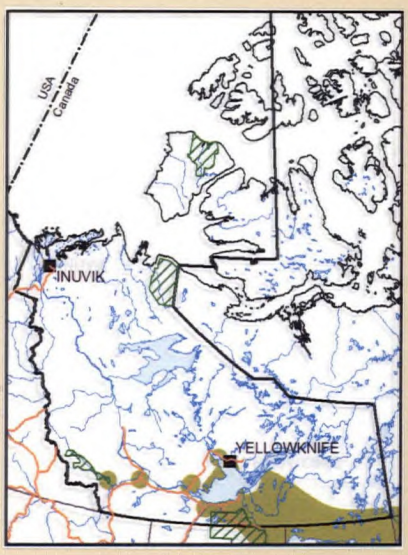
Jacques Brisson

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- nest in marshes dominated by sedges and grasses, wet meadows, and shrubby wetlands
- nesting areas have little or no standing water (generally 0-12 cm / 0-5 in) and the ground is saturated with water throughout the summer

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- habitat loss and degradation
- collisions with towers and other structures during migration
- human activities resulting in increased numbers of predators (foxes and ravens)



Did you know?

- Yellow Rails are rarely seen. They expertly hide in the dense marsh vegetation, aided by their camouflaged plumage.
- The unique call of the Yellow Rail is a rapid series of five monotonous and metallic ticks (or clicks) sounding like two pebbles or coins tapped together: *tick-tick, tick-tick-tick*. The clicking can be heard up to a kilometre away.
- Yellow Rails mostly call throughout the darkest part of the night.

SCHEDULE 1

NORTHERN WOLFFISH

Anarhichas denticulatus

THREATENED

DESCRIPTION

The Northern Wolffish is a thick, heavy-set fish with a pointed snout, small eyes, small tail and no pelvic fins. It has prominent canine-like teeth in the front of the jaws. These fish are gray to dark chocolate in colour with a light violet sheen, often with numerous but indistinct dark bars or spots.

Length: 0.8-1.45 m (2.6-4.8 ft)
Weight: 13.5-20 kg (30-44 lb)

The **Northern Wolffish** is a large solitary fish that is slow-growing and long-lived. It inhabits cold, deep ocean waters and preys on jellyfish, sea urchins, crabs and starfish. This fish does not undertake long migrations and the size of its territory is very restricted. Northern Wolffish reach maturity at five years of age and can live to 14 years. Northern Wolffish have been reported in only two locations in the Northwest Territories: Prince Albert Sound on western Victoria Island and Mould Bay on Prince Patrick Island.

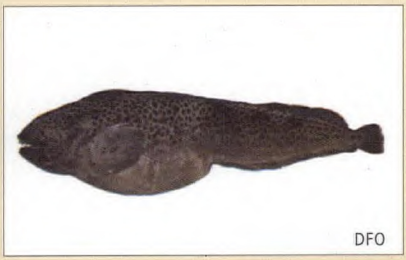
G. Taylor / DFO

Typical Habitatin the Northwest Territories

- offshore waters over soft bottoms and boulders, at depths of 150 to 900 m and in temperatures below 5°C (41°F)

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- predation by ringed seals



DFO

Did you know?

- Northern Wolffish use large rocks for shelter and to build their nests, where they spawn late in the year.
- The fearsome teeth of the Northern Wolffish ensure that it has few natural predators.
- In most areas this fish is not eaten by humans because of its watery and jelly-like flesh.

SCHEDULE 1

NORTHERN LEOPARD FROG

Lithobates pipiens (Rana pipiens)

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

The Northern Leopard Frog is usually green, or sometimes brownish, with dark spots surrounded by distinct light borders, and an unmarked, milky-white underside. Newly hatched tadpoles are slender and black.

Adult snout-to-vent length: 5-11 cm (1.9-4.3 in)

Newly hatched tadpole length: 8 mm (0.3 in)

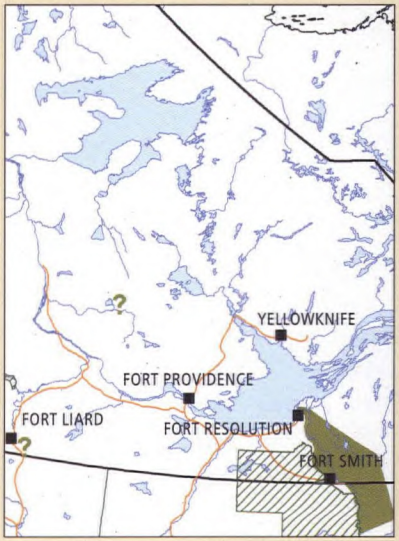
Northern Leopard Frogs are uncommon in the Northwest Territories, having only been found near the Slave, Taltson, and Tazin rivers. The only known over-wintering or hibernation site is near Frog Rock on the Taltson River. Their call is a long drawn-out rattling snore, usually ending with several rapid short grunts. The number of Northern Leopard Frogs has declined in many parts of western Canada since 1980 and the cause remains unknown.

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- breeds in lakes, ponds, marshes and flooded areas of streams
- summer ranges include meadows and grasslands
- over-winters in the unfrozen bottoms of rivers and lakes

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- hydro-electrical development could lead to loss of some over-wintering habitat
- climate variability (drought, fluctuating winter temperatures and freezing rain)
- diseases (ranaviruses and chytrid fungus)



Did you know?

- Northern Leopard Frogs may be more widely distributed than previously thought in the Northwest Territories. They may have been heard calling near the Horn Plateau and along the K-29 road near Fort Liard.

SCHEDULE 1

WESTERN TOAD

Anaxyrus boreas (Bufo boreas)

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

Western Toads are usually green or brown with reddish-brown warts and a light stripe down the middle of the back. Newly hatched tadpoles and toadlets are black.

Adult snout-to-vent length:
5-12 cm (1.9-4.7 in)

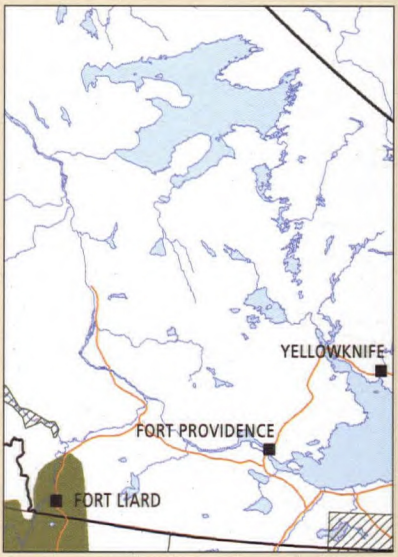
Newly hatched tadpole length:
1 cm (0.4 in)

Western Toads are found in the Dehcho region. They are nocturnal and difficult to find outside the spring breeding season when they congregate at ponds and begin calling (a quiet peeping like the sound of chicks). These toads have severely declined in the southern half of their range since the late 1970s, for reasons that are unknown.

Craig Machtans

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- breed in shallow silty or sandy ponds, lake shores, and roadside ditches
- summer ranges include shrubby-forested areas, wet shrublands, avalanche slopes, and meadows
- over-winter by burrowing in snow deep enough (up to 1.3 m / 4.2 ft) to prevent freezing and moist enough to prevent their skin from drying



Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- climate variability (drought, fluctuating winter temperatures, freezing rain, low snow cover)
- diseases (ranaviruses and chytrid fungus)

Western Toadlet

Did you know?

- Western Toads are one of the few amphibians that live in alpine areas.
- They can travel up to 7 km (4.3 miles) in less than a day, and prefer to walk or crawl rather than hop.
- Western Toads return to the same breeding sites year after year.

COSEWIC

PEARY CARIBOU

Rangifer tarandus pearyi

ENDANGERED

DESCRIPTION

Peary Caribou are the smallest of all caribou subspecies. In winter, they have a mostly white coat. Their summer coat is slate-grey with white legs and underparts. The velvet covering the antlers is grey, unlike the dark brown velvet of Barren-ground Caribou.

Length: 1.7 m (5.6 ft)
Males: Weight: 70 kg (150 lb)

Peary Caribou are found in small groups on the Arctic islands of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Their numbers have declined since the 1960s likely due to several years of unusually severe winter and spring weather.

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- summer range includes river valley slopes or other moist areas, and upland plains with abundant sedges, willows, grasses, and herbs

- winter range includes exposed areas like hilltops and raised beach ridges where the snow is thinner and it is easier to find food

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- severe winters and springs creating ice layers preventing Peary Caribou from reaching their food, sometimes causing starvation or inadequate fat reserves for females to reproduce
- competition with muskoxen for food
- hunting and predation may have contributed to population declines on Banks and Northwest Victoria Islands

Did you know?

- The Inuvialuit have taken a strong leadership role in protecting Peary Caribou. On Banks Island, only 36 tags are available yearly to hunters of Sachs Harbour. In 1993, hunters from Holman, Northwest Territories implemented a voluntary five-year moratorium on hunting Peary Caribou on Northwest Victoria Island. That moratorium ended in 1998 and is now reviewed annually. Since 1993, Holman hunters have not harvested any Peary Caribou on Victoria Island.

COSEWIC

DOLPHIN-UNION CARIBOU

Rangifer tarandus groenlandicus x pearyi

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

Dolphin-Union Caribou look similar to Peary Caribou (mostly white coat in winter, slate-grey with white legs and underparts in summer), but are slightly darker and the velvet covering their antlers is grey.

Dolphin-Union Caribou were once thought to be Peary Caribou; however, genetic studies have now clearly shown that they are distinct. Dolphin-Union Caribou calve on Victoria Island in the summer and migrate to the mainland of Nunavut in the fall. Once believed to be extinct, they have started to recover to about a quarter of the historic population size.

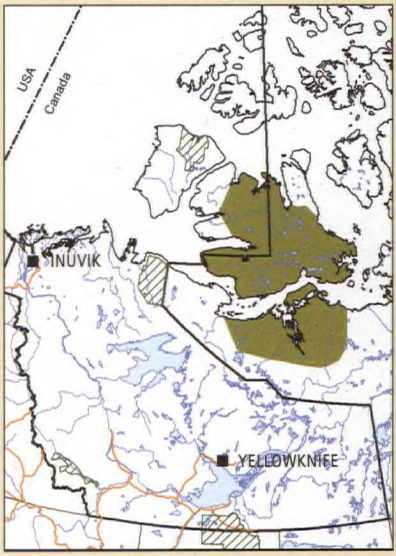
Mathieu Dumond

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- summer on Victoria Island, commonly using beach ridges and river valley slopes
- winter in the Bathurst Inlet area of Nunavut, in windswept areas with shallow snow cover

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- hunting rate could lead to over-harvesting
- overgrazing in areas used before migrating to Nunavut for the winter
- changes to sea ice freeze-up and break-up due to climate change could threaten migration
- increased ship traffic through Dolphin and Union strait for industrial activity may affect ice formation and caribou migration



Did you know?

- Once estimated at a population of around 100,000 animals, Dolphin-Union Caribou were almost extinct by 1924. Numbers are thought to have recovered to about 25 percent of their former abundance; however a full survey has not been done since the 1990s.

COSEWIC

GRIZZLY BEAR

Ursus arctos

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

Grizzly Bears are larger than black bears and more heavily built. They can be recognized by their prominent shoulder hump, dish-shaped face and long claws. Colour varies from light gold to almost black, with pale bears being the most common on the barren-lands.

Weight:
Males: 150-250 kg (330-550 lb);
Females: 120-160 kg (260-350 lb)

Grizzly Bears in the Northwest Territories, and throughout their range in Canada, are sensitive to population declines because they do not reproduce until they are between six and eight years of age, they have small litters (one to three cubs), and there are three to five years between litters.

Gordon Court

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- open or semi-forested areas, most commonly in alpine and subalpine terrain or on the tundra, and less commonly in the boreal forest

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- individual bears may be exposed to the negative effects of human developments or activities, even when they occur at a considerable distance from the core range of an animal
- increasing industrial development in the Northwest Territories may lead to an increase in bear-human conflicts and in human-caused mortalities

Did you know?

- Some areas of the Northwest Territories have the lowest recorded densities of Grizzly Bears in the world.
- Grizzly Bears can travel long distances and require large areas of habitat. One collared bear traveled 471 km (292 miles) in 23 days.
- Bears are very powerful animals. Learn to avoid conflicts with bears and always travel in groups

COSEWIC

POLAR BEAR

Ursus maritimus

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

Translucent hairs (sunlight partially goes through them) make Polar Bear fur appear white or off-white. Polar Bears have no shoulder hump, and they have shorter claws and a longer neck than Grizzly Bears.

Weight:
Males: up to 800kg (1750 lb);
Females: less than 350 kg (770 lb)

The Northwest Territories shares three **Polar Bear** subpopulations with neighbouring jurisdictions: Southern Beaufort Sea, Northern Beaufort Sea, and Viscount Melville Sound. Recent scientific research suggests the Southern Beaufort Sea population is likely declining, while the Northern Beaufort is considered stable. The Viscount Melville population is being harvested sustainably to allow population recovery.

Gordon Court

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- habitat is closely linked to the density and distribution of seals, and to the distribution of annual ice in the winter
- generally hunt on annual sea ice along coastlines from early winter until sea ice break-up, but may range more than 200 km (125 miles) offshore
- maternal denning sites are generally located on land in snowdrifts near the coast but have been found on sea ice

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- overall reduction in the total amount of sea ice available and the timing of break-up and freeze-up due to climate warming may change availability of seals
- hunting
- environmental contaminants (mainly organochlorines) and marine oil spills
- exploration and development that disturb bears in maternity dens can result in premature abandonment and increased chances of mortality in cubs

Did you know?

- Polar Bear skin is black, which helps them retain heat from the sun.
- In the Northwest Territories, Polar Bear hunting is controlled through a quota system recommended by the wildlife co-management boards.

COSEWIC

WOLVERINE

Gulo gulo

SPECIAL CONCERN - western population

DESCRIPTION

The Wolverine resembles a small, stocky bear. Colour varies from brown to black, often with a pale facial mask and yellowish or tan stripes running along its sides from the shoulders and crossing at the tail.

Weight:
Males: 12-16 kg (26-35 lb);
Females: 7.5-11 kg (16-24 lb)

Wolverine population densities are low but stable in the Northwest Territories. They are sensitive to disturbances because they only breed every two years, have small litters, and kits can have high mortality rates.

Rob Gau

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- wide variety of habitats, from the boreal forest, to alpine tundra and barren-lands
- can travel long distances and require large wilderness areas with adequate year-round food supplies

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- human development or activities, even if these disturbances are a considerable distance from the core range of a wolverine
- disturbances to denning areas
- human-caused mortalities
- habitat loss

Did you know?

- Wolverine fur is frost and ice resistant, and therefore highly valued for parka trim.
- They have large paws that help them move easily on top of crusted snow.
- They have strong jaws that allow them to crush bones and frozen food.

COSEWIC

RED KNOT

Calidris canutus rufa (rufa subspecies)
Calidris canutus islandica (islandica subspecies)

ENDANGERED - rufa
SPECIAL CONCERN - islandica

DESCRIPTION

The Red Knot is a medium-sized shorebird with a small head, straight black bill (tapering from thick base to thinner tip) and long tapered wings giving an elongated streamlined profile to the body. Red Knots in breeding plumage have a red face, breast and belly. Islandica Red Knots have more vivid breeding colours than rufa.

Length: 23-25 cm (9 to 10 in)
Weight: 135 g (5 oz)

There are at least two subspecies of **Red Knot** that are known to breed in the Northwest Territories. The *rufa* subspecies breeds on western Victoria Island, around Prince Albert Sound and winters in southern Chile and Argentina. The *islandica* subspecies breeds on the high arctic islands north of Banks Island and winters in northwest Europe. Both subspecies of knots lay three or four eggs in the last half of June and the chicks hatch in mid-July. Knot populations have dramatically declined since the 1980s due to a decrease in their food source on their migration route for *rufa* subspecies and their wintering grounds for *islandica* subspecies.

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- barren habitats in the Arctic such as windswept ridges, slopes, or plateaus
- nests usually placed in a small patch of vegetation

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- breeding habitat degradation (e.g. due to climate change)

Did you know?

- Nests are extremely hard to find because knots are well camouflaged and do not leave the nest, even when approached.
- To prepare for migration to their breeding grounds, Red Knots increase the size of the parts of their body used for flying (heart and flight muscles) and decrease the size of the parts not used for flight (digestive system). Once they arrive on their breeding grounds, their reproductive organs increase in size and their heart and flight muscles decrease to normal size.
- There is another subspecies of Red Knot, called *roselaari*, that is considered to be Special Concern by COSEWIC and that may also breed in the Northwest Territories. Work is underway to confirm whether *roselaari* occurs in the Northwest Territories.

COSEWIC

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER

Contopus cooperi

THREATENED

DESCRIPTION

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is a deep olive-grey, with a white breast and belly. The dark patches on either side of its white belly look like an unbuttoned vest. Its bill is short and stout, the top bill is dark and the bottom one is light with a black tip.

Length: 18 to 20 cm (7 to 9 in)
Weight: 32 to 37 g (1.1 to 1.3 oz)

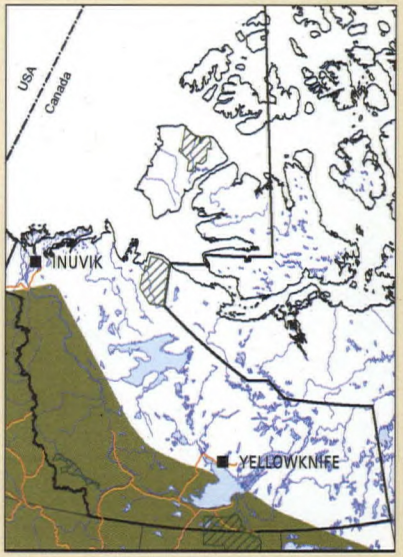
The **Olive-sided Flycatcher** arrives in the Northwest Territories in late May and early June. Females incubate for about 15 days and eggs hatch from the end of June to mid-July. The Olive-sided Flycatcher leaves the Northwest Territories from late July to early August and winters in South and Central America. It eats flying insects. Although reasons are unclear, many areas outside the north have reported significant declines in the numbers of Olive-sided Flycatchers.

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- within the boreal forest, near open areas containing tall trees or snags for perching
- young forest after a forest fire or clearcut

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- threats to the species are uncertain and may be more applicable to their southern breeding range and wintering range
- fire suppression as a forest management practice may be decreasing the availability of breeding habitat
- extreme weather on breeding grounds that decreases the availability of food could delay nesting or reduce nestling survival



Did you know?

- The Olive-sided Flycatcher perches on a tall tree or snag and waits for an insect to fly by before pursuing its prey.
- They have a loud song that sounds like "*quick, THREE BEERS*".

COSEWIC

COMMON NIGHTHAWK

Chordeiles minor

THREATENED

DESCRIPTION

The Common Nighthawk is a medium-sized bird, with dark brown plumage mottled with black, white and buff. It has long, slender, pointed wings and a long slightly notched tail. The head is large and flat, with large eyes, a small bill, and a wide mouth. In flight, a white patch can be seen on the wings of the adults.

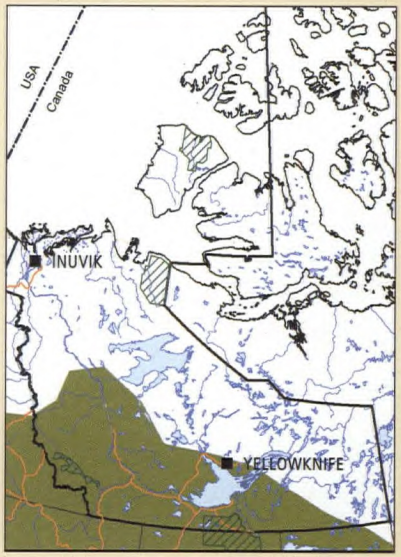
Weight: 65-98 g (2 to 3.5 oz)
Length: 21-25 cm (8 to 10 in)

Common Nighthawks arrive in the Northwest Territories to breed in mid-May to early June. They lay two eggs directly on the soil, sand, gravel or bare rock. Chicks remain in the nest area for about three weeks, during which the male feeds the nestlings and often the female. Fall migration to wintering areas in South America occurs from mid-August to mid-September. Many areas outside of the Northwest Territories have reported significant declines in the numbers of Common Nighthawks, for reasons that are unknown.

Jason Duxbury

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- nest in a variety of habitats such as sand dunes and beaches, open forests, forest clearings (including recently logged or burned areas), rocky outcrops, peatbogs, marshes, lakeshores, river banks, gravel areas (roads, quarries and flat gravel-covered roofs), and airports



Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- collisions with motor vehicles and aircraft
- human activities resulting in increased numbers of predators (cats, foxes, ravens, and gulls)
- reductions in insect prey due to pesticide use

Did you know?

- Common Nighthawks can be recognized by their loud, nasal *peent* calls and erratic, almost bat-like, flight. They actively pursue flying insects at dusk and dawn, often feeding on insects attracted to lights and insects swarming over bodies of water.
- Females can be distinguished from males by their throat band, which is buff rather than white. Juveniles do not have a throat band.

COSEWIC

RUSTY BLACKBIRD

Euphagus carolinus

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

Rusty Blackbirds are medium-sized forest birds. Males are black with a faint greenish gloss on the body and violet gloss on the head and neck. Females are brownish-grey without gloss. The edge of their feathers is rust coloured in both males and females.

Length: 21-25 cm (8.2 - 9.8 in)
Weight: 64 g (0.15 lb)

Rusty Blackbirds live in the boreal forest of the Northwest Territories. There has been a 90 percent reduction in the population of Rusty Blackbirds in North America over the last 30 years. However, there do not appear to be declines in numbers in the Northwest Territories.

Samuel Denault

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- throughout the boreal forest, in wetland areas during spring, summer, and fall
- typically congregate into flocks in the fall and migrate to the south and east-central United States

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- only likely threats in the Northwest Territories are changes to wetlands or prey possibly due to wetlands drying and changes in water chemistry, as a result of climate change

Did you know?

- Rusty Blackbirds rely almost exclusively on aquatic insects and larvae for food.
- This is one of the few birds requiring wooded wetlands both in the summer and winter.
- None of the species of blackbirds are protected by the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*, because when the law was written they were considered a pest species.

COSEWIC

SHORT-EARED OWL

Asio flammeus

SPECIAL CONCERN

DESCRIPTION

Short-eared Owls have small "ear tufts" and black bands that frame their yellow eyes. Females are slightly larger and darker than males and have heavier streaking.

Length: 34-42 cm (13.3-16.4 in)

The **Short-eared Owl** probably arrives in the Northwest Territories during April or May. They lay an average of seven eggs by mid-June and the owlets hatch in early July. Short-eared Owls usually leave the Northwest Territories by late October. It is uncertain where owls from the Northwest Territories winter. Short-eared Owls have suffered significant declines in western Canada since the 1960s, but recent information suggests current numbers may be stable.

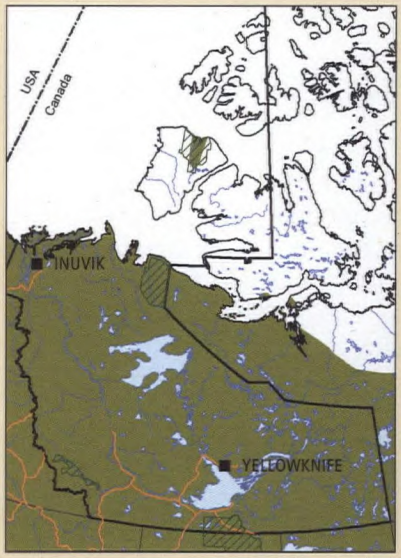
Doug Dance

Typical Habitat in the Northwest Territories

- in summer, nest on the ground in grasslands, tundra, bogs, marshes and other open (non-forested) areas
- areas with abundant small mammals (will move around as small mammal populations fluctuate)

Potential Threats in the Northwest Territories

- limited threats in the Northwest Territories
- loss of native habitat to agricultural crops or pastures
- human disturbances during nesting, often resulting in the nest being deserted



Did you know?

- One of the best ways to identify a Short-eared Owl is to watch its distinct moth-like flight when hunting (deep wing-beats, occasional hovering, and cutting low over patches of grassland or marsh).
- Short-eared Owls are the only owls that build their own nests.
- They typically search for food at dawn and dusk.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

PLANT SPECIES

Drummond Bluebell *(Mertensia drummondii)*
Hairy Rockcress *(Braya pilosa)*
Nahanni Aster *(Symphyotrichum nahanniense)*
Raup's Willow *(Salix raupii)*

GLOBAL CONSERVATION CONCERNS

The **Nahanni Aster** and **Hairy Rockcress** are Northwest Territories plants found nowhere else in the world. The **Raup's Willow** and **Drummond Bluebell** have very restricted distributions limited to the Northwest Territories and neighbouring areas. These four plants are globally rare species that have not gone through either the COSEWIC or the federal *Species at Risk Act* listing processes but have gone through the Northwest Territories General Status Ranks process (for more information go to: www.nwtwildlife.com).

The Hairy Rockcress is only found on Cape Bathurst.

The Nahanni Aster is only found in Nahanni National Park.

Drummond Bluebell

Raup's Willow

RARE PLANTS

Typical Habitat

- Nahanni Aster: only found in four or five moist areas near hot springs in Nahanni National Park Reserve, often near moss mounds, loose tufa (a type of calcite rock), sand and gravel, or along the banks of streams or seeps.
- Hairy Rockcress: first found in 1826 during an expedition in search of the Northwest Passage and recently reconfirmed on the Cape Bathurst Peninsula in 2004. Grows in sandy shore areas and eroding bluffs.
- Raup's Willow: prefers gravel floodplains and treed bogs and has only been found in two locations in the Northwest Territories, three in the Yukon, three in British Columbia, and two in Alberta.
- Drummond Bluebell: found in sandy and gravely banks or ridges in six locations in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and in four sites in Alaska.

Did you know?

- Some areas of the Northwest Territories remained glacier-free during the last ice age, which may have allowed species, such as these four plant species, to survive. Knowledge on these species and areas is limited, and more rare plant surveys are needed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Environment Canada
Canadian Wildlife Service
867-669-4700
sara.north@ec.gc.ca

Information on species at risk and the *Species at Risk Act*
www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Information on species at risk in the Prairie and Northern Region
www.pnr-rpn.ec.gc.ca/nature/endspecies/index.en.html

Information on species at risk maps
www.sararegistry.gc.ca/sar/index/map_e.cfm

Guidance document on species at risk and environmental assessment
Environmental Assessment Best Practice Guide for Wildlife at Risk in Canada
www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/publications/AbstractTemplate.cfm?lang=e&id=1059

Fisheries and Oceans Canada
204-984-0599
fwisar@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes

Parks Canada Agency
204-984-2416
www.pc.gc.ca/nature/eep-sar

Species at Risk Funding Sources
www.sararegistry.gc.ca/involved/funding/default_e.cfm

GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Department of Environment and Natural Resources
867-920-8064
or contact your regional Environment and Natural Resources office

Northwest Territories species information
w

Nort
v

Nort
v

Fre

GIS

OTHER A

Cor EWIC)

NWT
Species
at Risk